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Fathers' perceptions regarding parenting and discipline based on community norms and practices

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**FATHERS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING PARENTING AND DISCIPLINE BASED ON
COMMUNITY NORMS AND PRACTICES**

by

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THESIS

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Social Work

2011

MAJOR: SOCIAL WORK

Approved by

Advisor

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Fathers' Perceptions Regarding Parenting and Discipline based on Community Norms and Practices

The purpose of this paper is to examine fathers' perceptions associated with the use of child discipline, including corporal punishment or spanking. Compared to mothers, much less is known about fathers' parenting techniques and discipline of children (Amato and Gilbreth, 1999). Research has demonstrated that the nature of the father-child interaction is as important as how much time the father and child spend together (Amato and Gilbreth, 1999), yet the father-child interaction has not been a primary focus in past research.

Corporal punishment of young children

Corporal punishment, also known as spanking, has a long history of use in the United States. In the past, 1990's and earlier, corporal punishment was the primary discipline tactic used in order to control a child's behavior (Ember and Ember, 2005). Presently, research has shown that approximately 90% of parents have engaged in corporal punishment, or spanking, at least once during the child's life, typically in response to a problematic behavior (Grogan-Kaylor, and Otis, 2007; Lansford and Dodge, 2008). In addition, younger children have a higher incidence of corporal punishment compared to older children and adolescents (Day, Peterson and McCracken, 1998); and boys are typically spanked at a higher frequency than girls (Gershoff, 2002).

Although corporal punishment is frequently used to discipline children, research has shown that it may not be the best approach. For instance, parents often continue to use corporal punishment because it appears to change the child's maladaptive behaviors immediately; however, corporal punishment does not always change the child's maladaptive behavior over the long-term (Gershoff, 2002). Corporal punishment can lead to an increase in problematic behaviors in children, including increased aggression or other mental health concerns that may persist into adulthood, causing stress or concerns (Grogan-Kaylor and Otis, 2007; Taylor,

Manganello, Lee, and Rice, 2010). In addition, corporal punishment may inhibit the development of moral internalization, which children use in order to guide their behaviors and actions, leading children to become confused or engage in behaviors or actions that are in conflict with their morals, which can cause stress or concerns (Gershoff, 2002).

Demographic and psychosocial factors

Several factors may influence the use of parental corporal punishment, including maternal age, income status, marital status, and employment status. Younger maternal age is associated with greater use of corporal punishment, one possible reason is that younger mothers are less likely to know much about parenting (Combs-Orme and Cain, 2008; Lee, Y, 2009). Lower income or lower socio-economic status parents and single parent households may also have a higher frequency of corporal punishment (Berger 2004; Berger 2007). These parents often have less social support systems or family to rely on for support or help with parenting and often have to rely on their own experiences for discipline (Berger 2004; Berger 2007). Recent research has found that a higher education level of the father has led to an increase risk for paternal corporal punishment of the child (Lee, Perron, Taylor, Guterman, 2011); however, this finding was specific to the Hispanic population. Conversely, higher education of the father is indicative of a lower risk of corporal punishment by the mother (Guterman et al., 2009; Taylor, Guterman, et al., 2011). Research indicates the mother as the primary disciplinarian, more likely to utilize corporal punishment than fathers (Mahoney, Donnelly, Lewis, & Maynard, 2009), therefore, the relationship between the mother and father, specifically the parental involvement of the father in child rearing, may influence the use of corporal punishment by the mother (Guterman, Lee, Y, Lee, S.J., Waldfogel, and Rathouz, 2009). For example, mothers who perceive their child's

father has unhelpful, uninvolved, or associate other negative attributes to the father, may engage in corporal punishment more frequently (Bronte-Tinkew and Horowitz, 2010).

Psychosocial factors also influence the likelihood and frequency of corporal punishment. Parental stress, whether related to finances, employment or other factors, has been associated with greater frequency or likelihood of corporal punishment occurring (Dietz, 2000). In addition, mothers and fathers who use or abuse alcohol or drugs have been shown to engage in corporal punishment more often than those parents who do not (Miller, Smyth, & Mudar, 1999; Osborne & Berger, 2009; Lee, Perron, Taylor, Guterman, 2011). Substance abuse or use and other mental illnesses can lead to an increase in parental stress, which directly influences the occurrence of corporal punishment (Lee, Perron, Taylor, Guterman, 2011).

Community norms and perceptions

Parental perception about the normativeness of various disciplinary behaviors is an important factor to consider when discussing corporal punishment. For example, whether parents perceive children's behaviors as negative or positive may vary; parents' beliefs that children engage in negative behaviors purposefully or unintentionally will influence how the parent responds to the misbehavior. Specifically, parents may respond with greater harshness and use physical discipline, such as, corporal punishment, when they believe that the child is intentionally or purposefully misbehaving (Mahoney, Donnelly, Lewis, and Maynard, 2009). Attributing negative connotations to the child's behavior, or perceiving the child as poorly behaved, may contribute to an over-reactive, authoritarian parenting style, which increases the frequency of parental corporal punishment (Rodriguez, 2010; Gershoff, 2002).

Community norms may also increase the likely use of parental corporal punishment. Cultural norms and beliefs influence perceptions about child rearing and discipline practices,

which influence the likelihood of community members engaging in harsher discipline techniques (Lee, 2009). In communities with members who accept physical discipline as the norm, this technique will be employed at higher rates than in communities where this discipline technique is not the norm (O'Brien Caughy, Brodsky, O'Campo, and Aronson, 2010; Juby, 2009).

If the child perceives the physical discipline as normative then the child is less likely to exhibit maladaptive behaviors in response to the discipline (Mahoney, Donnelly, Lewis, and Maynard, 2009). However, few studies account for cultural differences or the child's basic understanding of why they are being disciplined. It is important to understand the differences in perceptions or understandings of corporal punishment in different cultures, because there are cross-cultural differences related to the use of corporal punishment (Lansford et al, 2005). For example, in some countries corporal punishment is viewed as an acceptable means of child discipline, while in other countries cultural norms reinforce the view that corporal punishment is abusive (Lansford et al, 2005). However, even with this knowledge that corporal punishment is normative in some communities, there are indications that the more often a parent engages in corporal punishment, the more likely the child is to develop adjustment problems (Lansford et al, 2005).

Fathers' perceptions of discipline

Father's perceptions of and use of discipline has not been widely researched, even though fathers' are becoming more active in the child-rearing process and caring for their children as the primary caregiver (Levine-Coley, 2001). Those studies that do focus on fathers tend to examine non-residential fathers and often do not address parenting techniques or perceptions about the parenting role (Amato and Gilbreth, 1999). For non-residential fathers, both the amount of time spent with the child and the quality of the interaction between the child and father influences the

child's wellbeing (Amato and Gilbreth, 1999). There are studies suggesting that half of non-residential fathers do not contribute emotionally or physically, with child support or being active in the child's life or in child-rearing (Levine-Coley, 2001). However, other research suggests that for non-residential fathers in particular, non-tangible forms of involvement may be difficult to capture; fathers may be involved, i.e. buy essential items, like diapers or food, or spend time with the child, however, these instances may go unreported because the involvement consists of non-legal agreements between the mother and father. Furthermore, the fathers as caregiver and disciplinarian is influenced by the quality of the mother-father relationship (O'Donnell, Johnson, D'Aunno, and Thornton, 2005; Shears and Robinson, 2005).

An ideology exists suggesting that many fathers are unprepared for parenthood, and have to overcome obstacles like financial concerns or low social support. In addition, fathers often spend less time with their children compared to mothers, and thus do not necessarily have the same understanding of their role as a caregiver and disciplinarian (Fagan and Iglesias, 1999). This is one reason for the importance of parenting programs specifically designed for promoting fathers as engaged and effective caregivers. Furthermore, implementing mentoring programs or parent education programs specific to fathers will affect the relationship between the child and father (Fagan and Ingelsias, 1999) and possibly influence the relationship between the father and mother.

Goals of study

There is little research examining how fathers view their role disciplining their children. This study examined men's perceptions of their role as a disciplinarian as well as assessed their beliefs about how community norms of discipline influences the fathering role. This qualitative study explores how fathers perceive their community norms regarding parenting and discipline

and whether fathers can identify other discipline techniques for modifying or changing their child's behavior. This study used a focus group methodology to gather information from a sample of urban father's regarding norms about the use of corporal punishment, or spanking.. This study uses a qualitative methodology, and is intended to be exploratory and to serve as a basis for developing research questions and hypotheses examining perceptions of fathers and their use of corporal punishment. This study will yield information that would be particularly helpful in developing interventions to address fathering skills and corporal punishment by fathers.

Methods

Basis for using a qualitative approach

Qualitative research is suited to different types of questions than quantitative data analysis. In this study, we seek to gain a better understanding of fathers' perceptions about their community's norms regarding discipline from their unique, individual perspectives. Given the lack of research on fathers this study seeks to develop new hypotheses that are driven by the dialogue generated in semi-structured focus group sessions, rather than attempting to quantify outcomes or make generalized assumptions about a population. This approach allows for more flexibility with fewer participants and provides an opportunity to discover themes that may be useful for hypothesis generation. In addition, this approach allows for discovery of any perceptions or ideologies fathers in particular have about parenting in their community.

Participant characteristics

The men were recruited from a human service organization in the metro Detroit area, that services men throughout the metro Detroit area. The only exclusion criterion was that the participants had to be males 18 or older. Any man who came to the focus group session and was

willing to participate was included. There were three focus groups comprised of men only. We did not collect demographic data on the first two sessions, due to an oversight; however, the men in the third session ranged in ages from age 31-48 and the men were recruited through the same organization. A demographic table (table 2) illustrates the demographics of focus group session three. All of the men in the third session self identified as African American. Fifty percent of the men in session three reported being single, however seventy-five percent of the men reported having children in the home. Interestingly, only 50% of the men reported having biological children, indicating that twenty-five percent of the men are caretakers of children that are not biologically their own. Fifty percent of the men reported being unemployed, while the other half reported being employed either part-time or full-time. Over half of the men reported that they had either a high school diploma or GED, and none of the men reported a lower education status. The men in session three were previously incarcerated; with eighty-seven percent of the men indicating that they had both committed a crime and have been imprisoned for a crime. See table 2 for a complete list of the demographic information.

Each focus group was comprised of six to eight men with two facilitators per group for a total of XX men who are included in this study. The facilitators were also men and recruited from the student population at Wayne State University. The facilitators maintained the flow of the group, asking questions and making sure each group member got an opportunity to speak. The facilitators did not add any commentary on the questions or their individual beliefs.

Procedures

Focus group participants were recruited primarily through the Matrix Human Services program. The goal for this program is to offer assistance for any person with needs throughout the metro Detroit area, in order to improve the quality of their lives and achieve self-sufficiency.

Matrix Human Services has a number of programs that include assistance with shelter, food, and employment, as well as a multitude of programs geared for fathers including the Head Start Fatherhood Initiative. This program produces an environment for fathers to become active or stay active in their children's lives. In addition, the Matrix Human Services program offers support for fathers recently incarcerated. While the men in all three focus group sessions were recruited from Matrix Human Services, only the men in session three were recruited from the programs for fathers who were recently incarcerated. Therefore, for some of the men participation was documented for their caseworker, meaning that they were told about the group and signed in on a sheet provided by a worker at the center indicating their participation. However, for the purposes of this study, we did not suggest or promote the necessity of these men being a part of the focus group session.

A maximum of eight individuals were included in each of the groups. Each focus group session took approximately one hour. The lead researcher spoke to the fathers about the goals of this focus group session and provided assurances regarding respondent confidentiality. Men were informed of their rights and responsibilities as research participants. Refreshments were provided at all focus group session, and participants were provided with a \$20 gift card of their choice for their time spent participating in the study. The focus groups were recorded and transcribed verbatim. One of the groups was comprised of previously incarcerated men; therefore, the researchers were able to make note of any themes that differed between the previously incarcerated group and the other groups.

Data analysis

Once all the men were present, the lead researcher addressed the group. After the lead researcher introduced the group and answered any questions, she turned the group over to the facilitators and the researchers exited the room.

The methodology of this research was to use a narrative approach. The transcripts were broken into outlines based on the questions asked in the focus group and each session was content coded according to themes using the outline format (see appendix 1 for a sample). The themes were based on the questions (see table 1) asked during the group. For example, one of the first questions asked was “Where do men in your community (neighborhood) get information or advice about parenting and how to take care of children”. The men in the groups responded similarly by suggesting that the majority of information was gathered from community and family. The coding of responses was based on what the men said, how often it was said and how many similar responses were given. For example, one of the questions the men were asked about was “what are common disciplinary practices that fathers in your community use?” The second man to respond spoke about taking privileges away, however also suggested that he communicates why the child is being discipline, “I take it from them, I tell them why”. From this comment, the other men also responded to the question on discipline but also mentioned whether or not they believed communication was an important discipline tactic, leading to the theme that communication is paramount to discipline for this particular group.

The content coding process involved reading the transcript for each session several times. After reading the transcript once for content, the researcher read the session again, and began highlighting reoccurring thoughts or themes. Following this iterative approach, we organized the themes into an outline format and then organized the themes into a table (see table 3). This table was used to compare sessions two and three for commonalities and differences. There were

initially three groups included, however we were unable to code the transcript for themes. It was expected that there might be a few differences between the groups because they were not conducted by the same facilitators or at the same time. In addition, session three was comprised on men who had been previously incarcerated.

Results

There were many similar themes in the groups regarding parenting practices. As mentioned above, there were three groups, however, only sessions two and three were coded and examined for commonalities and differences among the men. Community was discussed in regards to where men typically get advice on parenting and the community norms around discipline practices. In session two, the men focused on learning parenting, or specifically being a father, from their father. In addition to this, the men in session two discussed the idea that a male presence was beneficial to child rearing. One of the men stated, “We need a male presence in the schools...to help out the teacher”. Another man in the group suggested that the church was a good avenue to get information on parenting. For session three, the men also suggested that fathers get information via their family. Another source of information the men in session three suggested was from community members; i.e. church or talking with people in the community. However, the men in session three suggested that learning by experience is useful because different children require different parenting techniques. This is different from any of the conversations held in session two.

The men in sessions two and three both mentioned communication as a key component to discipline practice. The men in session two began the discussion by suggesting that talking with the child first, and then moving to other forms of discipline if the child is still misbehaves. However, the men then began to discuss other discipline practices and the importance of

consistency in discipline. For session three, the conversation centered on communication as an important factor in discipline. One of the men stated “I just talk to them...you know you don’t suppose to do that...and they will understand that”. Every man who contributed to the discussion on discipline spoke about communication being used along with the discipline. For example, one of the men stated “...they understand that if I have a certain tone. It’s alright let me back away and regroup and figure out what he really trying to tell me to do”. Again, both of these quotes illustrate that for the men in session three, the main component was communication along with discipline.

Additionally, both groups of men discussed other parenting techniques, such as time out and taking privileges away. It is interesting that in both sessions the men spoke about other discipline techniques in detail other than corporal punishment, indicating that they are aware of other means of discipline. In session two, one of the statements was that in some cases it is necessary to spank a child if communication or other techniques are not working, one of the men stated, “...it ain’t all physical with children, you gotta have a balance as they say.” The men in session three, had a similar response to the other uses of discipline. They mentioned the time outs and taking of privileges, however much of the conversation centered on using different discipline techniques on different children. For example, one of the men stated, “some discipline, some work, you gotta put that belt on them...others you just say stop that”. The men indicated that parents should not fear using corporal punishment, or spanking, however, many parents do because of the ramifications, i.e. protective services. Some of the men suggested that physical discipline could be beneficial; however, it is not a practice they employ based on their experiences or the ramifications of using physical discipline.

Another theme brought up in the sessions, was effective verses ineffective parenting techniques. There was a common theme among the group; communication was effective and useful when administering discipline. However, both groups also talked about different strategies. For instance, focus group session two, discussed the use of time outs and effectively communicating your emotions while administering the discipline techniques. Focus group session three, discussed techniques like teaching the child about problem solving, leading by example, spanking, and taking of privileges. As far as ineffective techniques, both groups suggested that disciplining, especially spanking, is ineffective, if the parent does not communicate to the child why they are being punished. In the focus group session two, the parents also communicated that a parent who was not fully aware, i.e. a parent who was extremely mad or on substances would not be effective at parenting, especially in regards to corporal punishment. For focus group session three, the men mentioned that all discipline techniques are ineffective if the child does not understand why they are being punished. In addition, the men stated that any type of abuse, physical, verbal or mental, would be ineffective as well. According to the men in session three, verbal or mental abuse consists of making a child feel poorly about themselves or berating them publically so they feel humiliated.

Finally, each session had an overarching theme that seemed to drive the conversations. The overarching theme in session two was the need for fathers to express their emotions to their children, especially their sons. The men seemed to focus on the idea that fathers and sons are viewed as weak in their communities if they demonstrate emotion. For example, one of the men stated that more men need to be able and willing to hug their sons and tell them they love them. This was brought up at the end of the session as well; the men discussed the importance of feeling loved. Focus group session three had a very different overarching theme. These men

discussed the need for more fathers to be present in child-rearing. One of the men stated that he is looking after someone else's child, "...I took on the responsibility there of another man's kids. He don't take care of them. He don't come see them. He ain't raising them." For session three, the men discussed the ramifications of fathers not being present in the child's life. For the boys, this often means not knowing how to treat a woman and for the girls not knowing how to be treated. The men suggested that this has led to some concerns regarding children's overall lack in discipline and respect in general.

There were two other themes that were brought up in the focus group sessions two and three; however, neither of these two themes was discussed at great length. The first theme centered on discipline practices that were not used in the community. In session two, there was discussion on the use of neighbors or other community members as disciplinarians. One of the men suggested that the neighbors do not typically discipline the neighborhood kids or talk to them about their misbehavior out of fear. In addition, this individual pointed out that many community members do not know each other very well anymore. In session three, the consensus suggested that there was not much discipline going on in the community. The men in this group stated that because fathers are not as involved or "stepping up" to their responsibilities, the children are not being taught respect and discipline. One individual stated "...the role of the father is absent...discipline is something to correct and properly guide behavior. There's a lack of it". Another man agreed stating "...no role being played by the father in my community." This theme was discussed as an overarching theme, however the point the men were trying to make was that there needed to be more discipline because there was an overall lack of it in their community.

The second theme that was brought up, but not discussed at great length was parenting programs in the community and whether they are useful tools for parents, fathers in particular. The focus group session two discussed the church, mentoring programs via the school and fathering programs as good sources for more information. However, the men in session two discussed the need for more programs for fathers. One of the men suggested having programs in place where the children and fathers could do an activity together to get involved. Another individual suggested that it was the responsibility of the community to get fathers involved in different programs; “It’s to the point that, right now, as men, we need to get some fliers, go door to door. Say we got the rec. center. Come on down and have a meeting.” The discussion was similar for session three. The men suggested that there are not enough programs available to men designed to help men become involved in child rearing. The men in this group suggested more mentoring programs, designed at helping fathers by teaching and activities. One individual suggested, “...mentoring covers everything. It covers parenting. Teaching about life.” The men suggested that parenting classes offer little support or help for the parent, specifically fathers. One individual stated, “Parenting class...it has a negative impact on the parents because it’s introduced from Child Protective Services.” For both session two and three, the men agreed that parenting or fathering programs would be beneficial; however, they would need to be implemented correctly.

Discussion

Qualitative research provides a contextual understanding of fathers and their understanding of community norms and parenting discipline. Specifically, using focus groups allows for an understanding of how fathers think about their role as a disciplinarian, and how they perceive their community. Many of the fathers in the focus groups demonstrated an

awareness of different parenting techniques, other than spanking. For instance, some fathers spoke of the use of time out or taking of privileges (*see table 3*). This illustrates that fathers know that there are other means of discipline; however, the majority of the fathers in the groups discussed the use of spanking as useful and important.

Past research has not focused on fathers' perceptions about community norms or the influence these perceptions have on parenting practices. Furthermore, there have been very little studies conducted on fathers, and their discipline practices. Conducting this research allows for the discovery of fathers' perceptions on parenting and how those perceptions influence the discipline used. This research highlights the importance of understanding community norms relative to parenting discipline and the role fathers' play as a disciplinary.

The aims of this study focused on discovering how fathers perceive their community norms regarding parenting and discipline. In addition, the researchers aimed to address whether fathers can identify other discipline techniques for modifying or changing behavior. The researchers discovered some common themes and understanding relative to fathers' understanding about community norms. In addition, the focus group sessions illustrated that these men have an understanding of other discipline techniques that are available for modifying behavior.

Since this study design was narrative, the researchers did discover themes regarding fathers' perceptions of their community norms. In regards to community norms, the men in focus groups sessions two and three stated that the people in their community typically engage in other discipline techniques than corporal punishment; i.e. time outs and taking away privileges. Furthermore, both sessions alluded to the fact that corporal punishment was not a primary discipline technique. Session 2 stated that many parents in their community feared the use of

corporal punishment because of the repercussions, i.e. protective services. The men in session three stated that in their communities, there was not a lot of any type of discipline being administered. For example, the men suggested that the fathers are absent in the lives of their children and this had led to children growing up without role models. In addition, the lack of discipline has led to a lack in respect. This demonstrates two very important understandings. Firstly, that the men in session three seem to have a different understanding of the type discipline being utilized compared to what is reported, as there are reports indicating that corporal punishment is widely used throughout communities (Dietz, 2000; Lansford and Dodge, 2008), indicating a need to research the effectiveness of corporal punishment on modifying a child's behavior. Additionally, the men in session two suggested that corporal punishment could not be used as a technique, because protective services would become involved, however, again this seems to contradict the indications of current research.

Another important theme, regarding discipline techniques used by father pertain to the men's understanding of effective verses ineffective discipline. In both sessions, the men recognized that for discipline to be effective there needs to be communication between the parent and the child. In addition, by sessions concluded that disciplining a child without communicating to the child why they are being punished is ineffective. This understanding by the men demonstrates an understanding of effective use of any discipline technique, which is important because there are still many individuals who punish a child without communicating the reason. Additionally, this highlights that, at least with these particular men, information on effective use of discipline is being understood by parents, therefore, research needs to be completed looking at the application or lack of application of effective parenting techniques.

There were some differences between the two sessions in regards to both effective and ineffective discipline techniques. For instance, in session two the men discussed the importance of fathers being able to communicate their emotions. Whereas in session three the men spoke about teaching the child through modeling and letting them learn from their own mistakes. In addition, the men in session three discussed the effects of abuse of any kind on the child, and how this would be ineffective discipline, where session two spoke about the parent's stability or awareness. The men in session two stated that in order for discipline to be effective the parent must be aware, i.e. not on any substances and not extremely mad. The different responses may be accounted for by the group members upbringing or background, however, session three was comprised of men who had been previously incarcerated, which may also explain the differences. This may be an area for future research.

Finally, there was discussion in the sessions about parenting programs and their effectiveness for reaching fathers in particular. In session two, the men discussed the various places where they could find programs or information on parenting, for example, church, programs through schools, and other various fathering programs. The men in session three stated that there were not many programs available to men, except for parenting classes, which many of the men in session three suggested were not helpful or useful. The men in this group stated that they would be more interested in a mentoring program or programs aimed at aiding fathers. This illustrates the importance of understanding what is effective when approaching parenting from the fathers' perspective.

Limitations of study

There were some limitations to this study. Firstly, the sample size is rather small, even for a focus group setting. We would have liked to run two or three more sessions to get a clearer

understanding of the similarities and differences of men within the metro Detroit area. Unfortunately, due to time constraints this was not a possibility. Even though the sample size is smaller than we would have liked, there are some important implications this study has highlighted. For example, the men's views on what parenting techniques are effective versus ineffective and the community involvement in parenting.

Another limitation this study has is the inconsistency with collecting the demographic information. Unfortunately, the demographic information was not collected for sessions one or two; therefore, it makes it difficult to compare the groups based on age or other demographic information. If we had collected this data, we may have gained a better understanding of the differences between the groups. In addition, the third session was comprised of previously incarcerated men, whereas, we are not sure if session one and two had men who were previously incarcerated or not. Had the researchers collected the demographic information, comparisons between the two groups of men and their perceptions about fathering could have been addressed.

Since this was a focus group, where multiple individuals had the opportunity to talk and the researchers not being privy to the actual group or the recording of the session, it is difficult to accurately state that all the men or most of the men agreed with a particular point. In addition, the transcriptions did not contain any distinction or separation between the speakers, making it difficult to match an individual's background and their comments. This is a necessary limitation to focus group data, if the goal is to keep the men anonymous to the researchers. Reliance on the facilitators to ensure that all of the men have an opportunity to give their point of view on a certain topic and relying on the transcribers to be accurate and thorough when transcribing the recorded session is imperative to this research.

Finally, since participation was voluntary there may be a selection bias towards men who are interested in learning more about and talking about fathering. Therefore, this sample may not be representative of what other fathers know in regards to discipline techniques or their community's norms relative to discipline techniques. However, this research is important because it is the first that discusses the fathers' perception on their community norms regarding discipline and what they think about discipline. Our goal was not to generalize our findings, but rather to expand our understanding of these men's experiences and perceptions of parenting and discipline.

Implications for future research

In order to implement intervention programs or change parenting behaviors regarding discipline, there needs to be an understanding of community norms relative to child discipline and an understanding of how parents' view their role as a disciplinary. Research suggests that fathers do participate in the discipline of children, however, without an understanding of these community norms or how the father views those norms, intervention is not possible. For instance, in the focus group sessions, fathers made note that parents should be able to discipline their children, as they deem appropriate, however, because of certain stigmas on physical discipline, many parents refrain from that parenting technique. Additionally, the fathers in session three felt that in many communities, children were not being disciplined. This perception is important when implementing interventions or programs geared at changing discipline strategies because it identifies a barrier or possible barrier to implementation. For example, if the parents in a community do not feel that there is much discipline being utilized, a program on why time out is a better discipline technique than corporal punishment may not be useful or helpful in that community, whereas, a program on how to implement discipline strategies may be very

beneficial. Therefore, it is important to understand the community's perceptions on discipline practices utilized. Finally, future research on the differences between men who are residential fathers, non-residential fathers and those who have been previously incarcerated may prove beneficial when looking at the implementation of parenting programs or interventions. The men in session three spoke in more detail about the disadvantages of parenting classes compared to the benefits of mentor-typed programs. Therefore, discovering the differences between these three groups is essential to developing intervention programs specifically designed to target the men in these different groups, allowing for more depth to the programs.

Table 1: The focus group questions during sessions

Question 1	People obtain parenting information from a variety of sources, including parents, friends, aunts and uncles, siblings, or professionals such as clergy, teachers, and doctors. Where do men in your community (neighborhood) get information or advice about parenting and how to take care of children?	
	<i>Probe 1</i>	What kind of parenting information do you get from these sources? (Including discipline, schooling/ education, recreation, medical care, etc.)
	<i>Probe 2</i>	Where else do you or other men you know get parenting information from? (Formal source of education on parenting and child development: social service agencies, head start, pre-school, school, doctors.)
	<i>Probe 3</i>	If you had a parenting question or issue, who would you ask?
	<i>Time Spent</i>	10-15 minutes
Question 2	Fathers discipline their children in different ways. For example, some fathers may spank their children, while some use time out; other fathers may use all of these strategies, while other fathers may not use much discipline at all. What are common disciplinary practices that fathers in your community use?	
	<i>Probe</i>	What are some disciplinary practices that are not frequently used by the fathers in your community? Why or why not?
	<i>Time Spent</i>	Approximately 6 minutes
Question 3	Do you think it is important for fathers to be involved in child discipline? Why or why not?	
	<i>Time Spent</i>	Approximately 6 minutes
Question 4	In your opinion, what are effective ways for a father to discipline a child?	
	<i>Probe</i>	For example, some people think that spanking is effective because it makes children respond immediately. Do you think that spanking is an effective way to discipline a child? Why or why not?
	<i>Time Spent</i>	Approximately 6 minutes
Question 5	In your opinion, what are ineffective ways for a father to discipline a child?	
	<i>Probe 1</i>	What makes you consider ____ to be effective, while ____ is ineffective?
	<i>Probe 2</i>	For example, some people may find that spanking does not work that well if it is used very frequently. Do you think that there are times when spanking may not be effective? When would that be?
	<i>Time Spent</i>	Approximately 6 minutes
Question 6	Are you aware of any parenting programs in your community that are specifically for fathers?	
	<i>Probe 1</i>	What about other parenting programs that may not be specifically for father but you or other fathers might consider participating in anyway?
	<i>Probe 2</i>	What kind of parenting programs would be of interest to you?
	<i>Time Spent</i>	10 minutes
Question 7	Do you have a smart phone? If so, how often do you use your smart phone to access the internet?	
	<i>Probe</i>	About how many text messages do you send each day?
	<i>Time Spent</i>	5 minutes
Question 8	Do you think that smart phones, twitter, or social media like Facebook would be an effective way to reach fathers? Why or why not?	
	<i>Time Spent</i>	5 minutes

Table 1: This table illustrates the questions the facilitators used in order to guide the focus group sessions

Table 2: Demographic Information: Session 3

Demographic	Range	Average	Median
Age	31-48	39.625	40.5
	Absolute Number	Percentage	
Single	4	50%	
LTP	3	37.5%	
Married	1	12.5%	
Employed	5	62.5%	
Unemployed	3	37.5%	
High School/ GED	5	62.5%	
Some College	2	25%	
College Degree	1	12.5%	
Children in Home	6	75%	
Children out of home	2	25%	
Primary Care giver	4	50%	
Convicted of a Crime	7	87.5%	
Imprisoned for a Crime	7	87.5%	

Table 2: Demographic information based on session-three focus group

Table 3: Themes from sessions 2 and 3

Focus Group Session	Session 2	Session 3
Parenting information from?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment • Church Programs • Community Norms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family (siblings, aunts and uncles) • Community (friends, barber shop, church) • Learn from mistakes made by other parents
Discipline techniques in community?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents should be able to hit their children (spank) however, many do not because of possible CPS involvement (most of the group members agreed you should talk to the child about why they are being disciplined) • Communication • Time out • Taking of privileges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spanking • Talking to child • Taking privileges • Communicate with child why they are being disciplined
Effective discipline techniques?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication (talking to child why they are being disciplined) • Time out • Being able to communicate your emotions • Consistency in discipline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication (talking to child about why they are being disciplined) • Finding the right discipline technique for the right child (some need to be spanked, and others can be talked to or have privileges taken away) • Lead by example • Teach child how to problem solve • Let child make their own mistake to learn from it
Ineffective discipline techniques?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical discipline without communication • If the parent is not mentally aware (i.e. on substances or extremely angry about the situation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical abuse • Mental/ verbal abuse (degradation/ insulting the child) • Any discipline technique would be ineffective, if the child does not know why they are being disciplined
Discipline not used in community?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spanking because of CPS • Using neighbors to help with discipline (i.e. neighbors being able to discipline child if misbehaving) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a lack of discipline in the communities as a whole, i.e. parents are not disciplining their children
Parenting programs in community/ where do you get information on parenting?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church • Fathering programs • Mentoring programs at school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parenting classes, however, these are not effective at reaching fathers • There are not enough parenting programs focused on mentoring and aiding fathers
Overarching theme?	The over arching theme seemed to be the need to emotionally express how you feel as a father to your children. There were concerns that it was not socially acceptable to hug and kiss your son and tell him you love him and allow him to say it back because it is seen as weak.	The over arching theme seemed to be that fathers play a very large role in child rearing and many are absent from children's lives. This has lead to boys and girls allowing themselves to be disrespected and get disrespected.

APPENDIX 1

Focus Group Themes:

- Where do Men go to learn about how to be a father
 - The Environment is a factor in child rearing
 - Church programs
 - Community Norms
- Discipline Techniques
 - Concern about hitting child, because of CPS and Laws against child abuse
 - A lot of agreement that fathers should be able to discipline child as they see fit
 - Some thought that corporal punishment was useless unless there was the communication to go along with it
 - There were concerns that mothers do most of the disciplining because fathers are not typically in the picture.
 - Even when fathers are in the picture, there seems to be a discord between mothers and fathers discipline.
 - There was discussion about how children act differently according to which parent is at home administering the discipline
 - Communication
 - Time outs
 - Hitting, but talking to kids about why
 - Taking privileges away (cell phone, use of computer)
- Discipline Techniques not used
 - Hitting is not seen very often because of CPS
 - Using the neighbors as aids in disciplining children
- Effective Discipline techniques
 - Communication
 - Writing about what you did wrong
 - Listen to what kids say, not just preaching to them
 - Reflections/ time out
 - Use of emotions (I love you, that's why you're being punished) (This topic was brought up frequently, not being about to communicate love to children, esp. sons without looking weak, or it being seen as bad)
- Ineffective Discipline Techniques
 - Physical Discipline without communication
 - Disciplining a child when the parent is not mentally right (either he is high or drunk or extremely mad)
- Places to get Information on Parenting
 - Church
 - Father Initiative Program
 - Mentoring Program at school
- The over arching theme seemed to be the need to emotionally express how you feel as a father to your children. There were concerns that it was not socially acceptable to hug and kiss your son and tell him you love him and allow him to say it back because it is seen as weak

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ABSTRACT**FATHERS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING PARENTING AND DISCIPLINE BASED ON
COMMUNITY NORMS AND PRACTICES**

by

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Determining fathers' perceptions of community norms on discipline is paramount to understanding how to develop social work interventions that target fathers' parenting behaviors. Understanding why a father engages in one form of discipline over another in child rearing and understanding how fathers view their parenting role is important when discussing implementation of parenting programs. This study was conducted using qualitative focus groups comprised of men ranging from late adolescents to mid-adulthood. The majority of the men were lower economic status, African American fathers recruited from a human services agency in Detroit. One-hour long, semi-structured focus group discussions were content coded, resulting in narratives based on several themes. There were four major themes presented; community resources for men to learn how to parent, discipline techniques used in the community, effective versus ineffective discipline, and an overarching ideology of the group. Two other themes were discussed in less depth: types of discipline not frequently used by parents in the community and fathering programs that are available or could be available to help men learn about parenting. The main conclusion was that while corporal punishment is practiced, the majority of these men

felt that other discipline techniques were used more often. Another important conclusion is the men in the focus groups suggested that parents should use communication with all other forms of discipline otherwise the discipline technique will be ineffective. Finally, the men in these focus group sessions suggested that programs aimed at helping or teaching fathers in constructive and concrete ways, i.e. having fathers engage in activities with their children or having a mentoring program, was preferable to a parenting class.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Being a Master's degree student in the School of Social Work at Wayne State University has been both challenging and rewarding. I found that the content and material that was presented in my courses was invigorating and motivating. It has always been an interest of mine to help individuals suffering from mental health concerns. However, I also found that there was a lack of research and evidence based practice learning. Although I had to take a research course and one evidence based practice course, I found that the majority of the material was not centered on, what I consider to be an important aspect of social work, research and evidence based practice. Even in those courses, the focus was not on how to use these two important aspects to further your social work practice, but rather how to get through the course. Therefore, I took upon myself, to complete a Master's Thesis. This experience has been extremely challenging, yet equally rewarding. I look forward to the day when I can continue working in research and program implementation, as I believe that it is through research and evidence based practice, that true change occurs.